

sum of money we spend, our health care outcomes—what we get for what we spend—lag behind many other countries in terms of life expectancy—how long our people live, in terms of infant mortality, and other health indices.

According to a recent report from the National Center for Health Statistics—this is just one example—the United States ranks 29th in infant mortality in the world—29th in the world. We are tied with Poland and Slovakia for 29th in the world in terms of infant mortality. In all due respect to our friends in Poland and Slovakia, we should be doing a lot better than that because we spend a lot more on health care than they do in Poland and Slovakia.

Further, according to a study published in the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the United States has the highest rate of preventable deaths among 19 industrialized nations. Although our rate has declined over the past 5 years, it is doing so at a slower rate than other countries. According to that study, if the rate of preventable deaths in the United States improved to the average of the top three countries, which are France, Japan, and Australia, approximately 100,000 fewer residents of the United States would die annually.

When we talk about health care, we are not just talking about individuals who suffer and die because they do not have health care. What we are talking about is that the high cost of health care—as President Obama makes clear all of the time—is a major economic issue as well. In our country today, we are now spending about 16 percent of our GNP on health care, and the cost of health care is continuing to rise at a very high rate, which becomes economically unsustainable. The fact is, General Motors, which recently declared bankruptcy, spends more money on health care per automobile than they do on steel, and that creates an economic climate in which America—our companies—becomes noncompetitive with other countries around the world. But it is not just large corporations such as GM. Small business owners in Vermont and throughout this country are finding it harder and harder not only to provide health care for their workers but even for themselves.

In addition, a recent study found that medical problems contributed to 62 percent of all bankruptcies in 2007 and that between 2001 and 2007, the proportion of all bankruptcies attributable to medical problems rose by nearly 50 percent. Interestingly, 78 percent of those who experienced bankruptcy as a result of illness were insured. They were insured. These are not people who did not have any health insurance. But it speaks to the inadequacy and the lack of coverage, comprehensive coverage, in many health insurance programs.

We as a Congress, for whatever reason—and I will suggest the reason in a moment—do not really spend a lot of time discussing why the American

health care system is so expensive, why it is so inefficient, why it is so complicated. We do not talk about that very much. I fear that has a lot to do with the role private health insurance plays over the political process in this country. Let me be very clear. In my view, the evidence is overwhelming that the function of a private health insurance company is not to provide health care. The function of a private health insurance company is to make as much money as it possibly can. The truth is, the more health care a private health insurance company denies people, the more money it makes. If you submit a claim for coverage and they deny it, from their perspective that is a very good thing because they make more money.

Further, in pursuit of making as much money as they can, private health insurance companies have created a patchwork system which is the most complicated, the most bureaucratic, and the most wasteful in the world. According to a number of studies, we are wasting about \$400 billion a year in administrative costs, in profiteering, and in bureaucratic billing practices. That is enough money to provide health care to all of the uninsured.

I know that is not an issue we are supposed to be talking about here on the floor of the Senate because we are not supposed to take on the insurance companies or the drug companies because of all of their power. But I believe, if we are serious about moving toward a universal, comprehensive, cost-effective health care system in this country, we have to talk about the very negative role private health insurance companies are playing in that process.

Administrative costs for insurers, employers, and the providers of health care in the United States are about one out of every four health care dollars we spend. In other words, for every \$1 we spend, one quarter of that dollar does not go to doctors, does not go to nurses, does not go to medicine, does not go to therapies; it goes to administration. That is at the root of the problem we have in terms of health care costs in America. In California—one example—only 66 percent of total insurance premiums are used to cover hospital and physician services. One-third, \$1 out of every \$3, is spent on administration, billing, claims processing, sales and marketing, finance and underwriting.

The American people want their health care dollars spent on health care. I know that is a radical idea, but when people spend money on health care, they assume it goes to the provision of health care, not profiteering, not administration, not hiring more bureaucrats to tell us we are not covered when we thought we were covered. What the American people want is close to 100 percent of that dollar to go to health care and not bureaucracy.

While health care costs in America have soared, as everybody knows, from

2003 to 2007 the combined profits of the Nation's major health insurance companies increased by 170 percent. Health care costs are soaring, profits of the major health insurance companies have gone up by 170 percent from 2003 to 2007, and CEO compensation for the top seven health insurance companies averaged over \$14 million per CEO. To add insult to injury, some of these health care profits are going directly into campaign contributions and into lobbying to make sure, in fact, the Congress does not move forward toward real health care reform, which, in my view, means a single-payer health care system.

That is where we are right now. We have the most inefficient, wasteful, bureaucratic system of any major country on Earth. Our health care outcomes, despite all the money we spend, are way below many other countries in the world. And we are not discussing the most important issue with regard to health care spending; that is, the role private health insurance companies are playing.

We are now in the beginning of the debate on health care. I am going to do my best to make sure that issue of the role private health insurance companies are playing in the system, the very negative role they are playing, is something that, in fact, we talk about.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio is recognized.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I commend my friend, the junior Senator from Vermont, for his words, this critique about the health insurance system—what is right about it and what is wrong with it. We know, for those with insurance, we can get good medical care in this country. We know many people do not have any insurance. We know many others have inadequate insurance. And we know that so many Americans are in a situation where they are anxious about the future of their health and the quality of health care they have. Too many Americans have seen their health care premiums go up, their deductibles go up, and their copays go up. They end up with a private insurance company that finds ways to delay paying them, to in many cases not reimburse them at all for their health care expenses. It is insurance that does not really deliver, and that is really no insurance at all.

What Senator SANDERS said is exactly right. The behavior of health insurance companies has meant we have huge administrative costs.

More and more, we remember what the President of the United States said when he was a candidate for President. Senator SANDERS mentioned that story at the White House the other day to President Obama, how moved people in this country were when they heard the President talk about his own mother who was dying, who was fighting with insurance companies over paying for her cancer treatment while she was dying. She had to advocate for herself.